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SUBJECT: UNGA THIRD COMMITTEE DISCUSSES SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, RIGHTS OF CHILDREN, AND INDIGENOUS
ISSUES

11. SUMMARY: From October 6-21, the UN General Assembly Third Committee formally discussed social development, advancement of women, rights of children, and indigenous issues. The broader themes discussed under these topics reflected those raised during the UN General Assembly General Debate, namely the global food, financial, and energy crises, and the need to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals, especially those focused on poverty eradication, education, and health care. Speakers from developing countries called for technical and financial assistance to enable them to enact programs on these issues. Many speakers expressed concern regarding the UN's slow progress in achieving gender balance within its own institutions, as well as the UN's as-of-yet failure to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Children. The representatives of several Arab nations used many of these discussions to make comments regarding Israel's "occupation" of the West Bank and Gaza and other territories. Russia used the discussion on rights of children to blame Georgia for the recent conflict. END SUMMARY

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

12. During four formal meetings October 6-7, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee discussed social development. Speakers included the Under-Secretary-General (SYG) for Economic and Social Affairs, the Acting Director of ECOSOC's Division of Social Policy and Development; the Executive Coordinator of the UN Volunteer Program; the Director of UNESCO's Division for the Coordination of UN Priorities in Education; observers from the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); representatives of 59 countries, and the Palestinian observer. Public Delegate Cheryl Halpern delivered the U.S. statement, which focused on the need for greater international efforts to eradicate illiteracy. (The complete texts of all U.S. statements can be found at www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov.)

13. Key themes from the discussion included improving access to healthcare and education; increasing employment opportunities; protecting the rights of persons with disabilities; addressing the needs of aging populations and youth; eliminating diseases such as HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, and malaria; developing small and medium enterprises; promoting literacy; and encouraging volunteerism. Many speakers focused on the impact of poverty and hunger -- worsened by the global food, financial, and energy crises, as well as climate change -- on already-vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, and women and children. Representatives of developing countries noted that the lack of financial and technical resources was stalling their progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They called upon the developed countries to fulfill their assistance commitments.

14. Speakers from Central and Latin America stressed that the

financial crisis was a major obstacle to social development, advocating more "people-centered" economic policies as opposed to capitalism. Cuba pointed to the "unfair international reality" imposed by "powerful countries" as the main cause of unemployment. India said it was time for the Bretton Woods institutions to stop being the "cheerleaders of capitalism" and revert to their initial goal of providing assistance to countries to maintain high levels of employment. Burma complained about the imposition of "unilateral sanctions and coercive measures," which the speaker said worked against national and international efforts to increase employment. Lebanon blamed Israel for impeding social development in the Middle East, and Syria called for attention to the rights of persons in territories under foreign occupation, expressing particular concern regarding the "plight" of older persons in these territories.

ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

15. During five formal meetings October 13-15, the Third Committee discussed advancement of women. Speakers included the Assistant-SYG and Special Advisor to the SYG on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; the Director of the Division of the Advancement of Women; the Executive Director of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the Chairperson for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the Executive Coordinator of Global Health of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); observers from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the IOM, the ILO, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development; representatives of 80 countries, and the Palestinian observer. Ambassador T. Vance

McMahan delivered the U.S. statement, which emphasized the need to end sexual violence, particularly in situations of armed conflict.

16. Key themes from the discussion included eliminating discrimination against women; eliminating all forms of violence against women; combating trafficking of women and girls; providing sexual and reproductive healthcare, with specific goals of reducing maternal mortality and supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula; achieving gender equality in the workplace; ensuring girls' access to education and encouraging attendance; promoting women's participation in public life; ensuring equal property rights for women; eradicating poverty; and protecting the role of rural women. The need to fulfill the MDGs was referenced often, with some speakers describing their perception of the "feminization of poverty." Many speakers, including the European Union (EU) via France's statement, called for the creation of a new gender entity with the UN system, which would coordinate the UN's existing gender-focused entities. Several speakers also criticized the UN's slow progress in achieving gender balance within its own institutions, to which the Special Advisor to the SYG on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women responded that her office was also frustrated, explaining that there were not many female applicants for senior-level vacancies, and that the UN was working more actively to recruit qualified female candidates. Speakers from developing countries noted their lack of resources, and called for technical and financial assistance to work towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

17. Sudan, Syria, and Palestine used the question and answer session following the presentation of reports to bring up the situation of women in areas under foreign occupation, with Syria specifically referring to Israel's "occupation" of the Golan Heights. Qatar, Oman, Sudan, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian observer also raised this during their statements, although not all specifically referenced Israel. During its statement, Cuba called the U.S. embargo "a genocide act," claiming that it is the "biggest form of violence" suffered by Cuban women. Japan spoke in exercise of the right of reply in response to the

Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) comment during its statement that Japan "denies its past," and the DPRK responded that Japan had become "double-faced," noting concern that because Japan was denying the "crimes" it had committed against the DPRK, it was likely to repeat such crimes.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

¶8. During four formal meetings October 15-17, the Third Committee discussed rights of children. Speakers included the Special Representative of the SYG for Children and Armed Conflict; the Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF); the Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC); observers from the IPU, the IOM, the ILO, the IFRC, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta; representatives of 71 countries, and the Palestinian observer. Ambassador T. Vance McMahan delivered the U.S. statement, which underscored the need to protect children against abuse, exploitation and violence.

¶9. Key themes from the discussion included protecting children in situations of armed conflict, including ending the recruitment and use of children as child soldiers; eliminating all forms of violence against children; eliminating sexual exploitation of children; ending child labor; eradicating poverty; providing health care for children and preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS; addressing the needs of children living without guardians; protecting the rights of detained children and finding alternatives to the detainment of children; and protecting children's rights to education and nutrition. Nearly every speaker made positive comments about the Special Representative of the SYG for Children and Armed Conflict's work. Many speakers noted their concern that a Special Representative on Violence against Children had not yet been appointed as stipulated in a 62nd UNGA resolution. The Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that candidates for the position were currently being interviewed. Representatives from several countries noted their support for the CRC's reform efforts, including its decision to work in two chambers to help reduce the backlog of reports pending the Committee's consideration. The CRC Chairperson called for Member States who had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child's Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the Optional Protocol on the

involvement of children in armed conflict. The EU, via France's statement, said that discussions were underway regarding the potential drafting of a third Optional Protocol, which would grant the CRC authority to review individual complaints.

¶10. Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, and the Palestinian observer used the question and answer session following the presentation of reports to bring up the situation of children in areas under foreign occupation, specifically the situation of Palestinian children in the West Bank and Gaza. Sudan, Egypt, Iran, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Malaysia, and the Palestinian observer also raised this during their statements, with the Palestinian observer stating that more than 1,000 children had died as a result of Israel's "occupation" of the West Bank and Gaza. Israel expressed concern regarding the "indoctrination of children into the world of extremist ideology," listing as an example practices used at Hamas-run "summer camps." During its statement, Cuba noted that it had made progress in protecting children's rights in spite of the financial and economic "blockade" imposed by the United States, and said the "Bush plan" was "willfully ignorant of the will of the people" in terms of their right to self-determination. Russia spoke in exercise of the right of reply in response to Georgia's reference during its statement

to acts of violence committed by a neighbor, listing anecdotal cases "proving" that Georgia had committed acts killing and injuring many children in South Ossetia. Georgia reaffirmed that it was still open to its request for an international investigation into the conflict, noting that Russia had rejected the request.

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

¶11. During two formal meetings October 20-21, the Third Committee discussed indigenous issues. Speakers included the Under-SYG for Economic and Social Affairs; the Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; experts from the UN Development Fund for Women, the ILO, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development; and representatives of 17 countries. The Under-SYG for Economic and Social Affairs highlighted several positive steps taken by the international community during the past year, but noted that indigenous communities continued to suffer from exclusion, exploitation, discrimination, extreme poverty, and violence and persecution, with some facing the threat of extinction. Many speakers expressed concern regarding the impact of climate change on indigenous populations, as they often live in the areas hit hardest by natural disasters. Several speakers touched upon the importance of preserving indigenous languages, and others outlined their country's efforts to incorporate multicultural curricula into the education system.

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